DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 351 800 EA 024 493

AUTHOR Sokoloff, Harris; Fagan, John
TITLE Restructuring for Collaboration: A Case Study of School-Based/University-Based Collaboration.
PUB DATE Feb 92
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Administrators (San Diego, CA, February 21-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; *College School Cooperation; *Collegiality; *Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Instructional Improvement; *Interprofessional Relationship; *Organizational Development; Participative Decision Making; School Based Management; *School Restructuring
IDENTIFIERS Partnerships in Education

ABSTRACT

A case study of a school district/university partnership for school restructuring is described in this paper. The collaborative effort focused on improving educational quality rather than changing the organizational structure; the goal was to turn all relationships within the school into learning relationships. The partnership focused on the core tasks of teaching and learning and changing the interaction among teaching professionals. Activities included the cultivation of both formal and informal leadership and the evolution of a new quasi-governance structure--a Change Council composed of district educational representatives who participated in university-led training sessions. The shift to a collaborative focus most strongly affected the role of the principal, who is in the middle between school-based and districtwide initiatives and between teachers and the superintendent. The principal's "middleness" may represent the most difficult challenge in restructuring relationships when shifting to a collaborative arrangement. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED351800

RESTRUCTURING FOR COLLABORATION: A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL-BASED/UNIVERSITY-BASED COLLABORATION

A Paper Presented to the
American Association of School Administrators
February 21-24, 1992
San Diego, CA

Harris Sokoloff
Executive Director
Center for School Study Councils
Graduate School of Education
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA

John Fagan
Superintendent
Oak Park School District, Number 97
Oak Park, IL

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

H. Sokoloff

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EA 024 493

It has been more than five years since the national call to "restructure" schools and schooling first began. Over those years, many school districts have focused their improvement efforts on "shared governance," "site-based management," and "shared decision making." All are expected to lead to school improvement. The argument is that moving decisions about important educational issues closer to those who must implement those decisions will improve worker performance. There is, however, precious little research to suggest any close connection between management and leadership *structures* and improved student *performance*.

Indeed, one could argue that simply replacing one centralized management *mechanism* with a less-centralized or decentralized *mechanism* is beside the point. Focusing on the decision-making processes, on "how" decisions are made could yield "restructured" or "reorganized" schools without ever having an impact on the learning that goes on in such "restructured" or "reorganized" schools. What is important in restructuring in not simply that we change the organizational structure, but that those changes focus more sharply on the core tasks of teaching and learning.

Sarason (1990) and Barth (1991) are among the stronger voices arguing that it is the **quality** of the relationships between students, teachers, principals, and administrators that make the most difference. The particular quality we are interested in is an educational quality: the quality of learning. We seek to make all relationships in schools learning relationships.

Within this view, restructuring focuses on changing the relationships among adults in schools.[1] It is about changing the ways those adults take up their roles. Thus, we restructure school organizations as a means to creating an organizational structure that makes it more likely that teachers, principals, and central office administrators will take up their roles as learners in the broadest sense.

---

[1]Sarason rightly extends this to relationships between "children" and adults. In this project we restrict our attention to relationships among teachers, principals, and district level administrators.

When we move from the macro to the micro level, the question arises: What prompts restructuring in a successful school district, such as the district in this project? Standardized test scores were stable in the low 70th percentile for ten years. Per pupil expenditures and parent satisfaction were high. The community had managed its integration efforts well. Teachers had recently settled a three-year contract assuring them salaries in the top quartile range among neighboring districts. All was going quite well. Or was it?

The concerns of a few became the complaints of the many. Tax bills suddenly were too high while school district debt mounted. Parents and teachers were resisting increased central office control. Minority achievement did not match the achievement of white students. Six of seven board members changed in a period of two years and the superintendent retired.

Under the direction of the new board of education and the new superintendent, the district began to restructure. A tax levy increase was passed on its second attempt stabilizing the districts finances while central office administrative staff was reduced to half the number. With broad community involvement, a strategic plan was developed that included the appointment of a director of multicultural education.

Curriculum development, staff development, and minority student achievement received a new emphasis. An existing committee of administrators and teachers, the CEC, refocused its efforts on designing strategies that would allow the district to move in the direction of its mission statement. The concepts of shared decision making and individual school improvement plans that grew out of these deliberations indicated a need for more expertise and guidance than the district staff could provide resulting in a school district/university partnership to support the restructuring effort.

Collaboration has defined the school-university relationships on this project. We have, first and foremost, viewed each other as practitioners who are based in different kinds of organizations. Each brought a different kind of expertise to the work. University practitioners brought a sound footing in research and theory, as well as a strong disposition for reflection in

practice. School-based practitioners brought a deep involvement in everyday practice as well as a diversity of experience. Thus, each has a different perspective on practice to bring to the collaboration. University-based and school-based practitioners have different perspectives on both theory and practice. Coming from these different perspectives, we use theory to critique practice and use practice to critique the adequacy of theory. These different perspective acted as parallel activities, each reflecting the other, together building an eclectic whole that is sufficiently flexible to change as needed.

The university consultants brought a "system" perspective to our work together. We knew that changes in any aspect of the district would be felt throughout the district. Further, we knew that those vibrations would be exhibited both in the work people did as well as in the psycho dynamics of that work.

Thus, we expected that the downsizing of the central office staff would lead not only to a restructuring of responsibilities, but also to a restructuring of relationships. Gone was the traditional hierarchy of assistant superintendent, director, and supervisor. Now all central office administrative staff were directors and interacted directly with the superintendent as well as with each other. In place of the more traditional departmental structure, an executive team was formed with each director working directly with principals in coordinating district-wide efforts, a role previously played by the assistant superintendent. Day-to-day building operation issues were handled by the principal, with intervention/assistance when necessary by the superintendent. Now principals had to look to five directors for district direction and answer to the superintendent for the potholes of daily school operations.

To add to their confusion, principals were asked to change their relationships with their teaching staffs. Under the previous superintendent, principals returned from principals' meetings with orders on what to do next. Now they returned with problems and were expected to engage their teachers in finding solutions appropriate to their building. Teachers had been waiting for this opportunity, embracing it with a fervor that frequently off-balanced a principal. Solutions from the principals were treated by suggestions by staff. Agreement on solutions among teachers was

seldom unanimous. Clear limits of authority seldom existed. Strategic management and consensus building skills were needed.

The directors and superintendent--housed in one small building, communicated daily and adjusted to a new working relationship. Principals in ten different buildings --frequently not talking to even one other principal a day --perceived themselves as having six bosses and no clear authority over teachers. Principals who had seen themselves as an extension of the district office were not expected by their teaching staff to be advocates to the district for their building needs. Truly, principals were caught in the middle.

Throughout the first year and a half of the project, we focused on cultivating both formal and informal leadership in the district. The meetings with the CEC included teachers, principals, and central office staff working together on "restructuring." Part of this work focused on developing "leadership" skills, particularly strategic management skills: brainstorming techniques, nominal group technique, responsibility charting, problem framing, and problem solving among others.[2] In each case, these skills were taught as part of working through issues we were facing in our work together. For example, it became clear early in our work that teachers and administrators alike were concerned bout shifting responsibilities due to restructuring. While learning a technique called "responsibility charting," teachers and administrators worked together to unpack both the issues and developed a clearer understanding of emerging lines of responsibility.

However, this process did more than clarify emerging lines of responsibility and it did more than teach participants a valuable to continue clarifying those lines even as they were shifting. Importantly, this process was a way of cultivating the leadership of those involved -- teaching them some leadership tools while engaging them in the work of leadership. Because teachers and administrators were doing this work together they also began to share leadership. Working together, they began to take up those leadership roles together developing stronger

[2]The specific strategic management tools we used were adapted form tools developed by the Wharton Center for Applied Research, based on management and strategic thinking literature.

collaborative relationships. In the somewhat protected setting of our meetings together, participants could experience in working together, building trust within that experience. Though hierarchical relationships still existed back in their schools, participating administrators and teachers had new experiences with each other they could rely upon. Thus, whereas in the beginning they could barely imagine what "restructured" schools might look like, by working together in our meetings, they came to understand new ways of working together. In this way, they began to restructure their relationships, to take up their roles together in new ways, and their roles began to change.

Finally, a new quasi-governance structure began to evolve. A Change Council was formed with membership that included the superintendent, the president of the teachers' association, a board member, all the directors, all principals, and teacher representatives from every building. This council's task was to formulate annual goals for the district that would lead to accomplishment of its mission. The council would participate annually in a two-day summer retreat and two one-day meetings during the school year to assess progress. These sessions were led by the university consultants.

Using the strategic plan as a guide and its mission statement as a target, the council concentrated first on ways of working together. Monitoring district efforts throughout the year would be done by the central office with input from the principals. Each building would establish its own leadership team, led by the principal, to address specific strategic issues for that building.[3]

With those operational structures in place, the Change Council chose in its second year to tackle the issue of student achievement. Rather than debate the validity and usefulness of standardized test scores, they decided to all look at their own teacher practices in the spirit of collaboration. Each school was encouraged to define ways in which teachers could talk to each other about their practices, observe and comment on each other's lesson delivery, and develop

[3] A separate working conditions committee meets monthly to serves as a sounding board on matters that could not be resolved in individual buildings or across the district.

ways to research, try and evaluate new materials and techniques.[4] Teacher led workshops would be encouraged at the building and district level. Principals were expected to enter into this dialogue.

Indeed, formally and informally structured interaction among professionals **about** teaching and learning distinguishes a collaborative school from other models of organization. The focus on core tasks of teaching and learning are what bridge site-based management and shared decision-making with education. And it is this focus that has defined our work on this project.

This shift to a collaborative focus has had it strongest impact on a redefinition of the principalship. Collaboration at the school level focused first on the principal's role in encouraging teachers in working together to improve teaching. The close principal-teacher relationship at the CEC level provided a great deal of support for this work. Meetings of the CEC provide an ongoing foundation for collaboration at this level, as does ongoing work building the leadership skills of principals.

But it quickly became clear that principals' relationships with each other, with the central office administrators, and with the superintendent needs attention. Restructuring around collaboration exaggerates two aspects of the middleness of being a principal. (Smith, 1982)

First, they are in the middle between school-based and district-wide initiatives. On the one hand, principals are expected to build collaboration in their schools. They must work with the teachers to develop programs that will best serve the needs of the children in their charge. On the other hand, principals must make sure that those programs fit within the strategic plan and the instructional and curricular initiatives set at the district level. This is a delicate, but not impossible balancing act. Our experience has shown that by working collaboratively with teachers. principals can develop richer ways of adapting district-wide initiatives to local conditions.

---

[4] This is an expansion of Little's view of collaborative teaching, as quoted in *The Collaborative School.* Our point here is that collaboration has to pervade schools. Not only must teachers collaborate (with each other and, perhaps, with principals) around the practices of teaching, but principals must collaborate (with each other and, perhaps with teachers) around the practices of school leadership.

instructional and curricular initiatives set at the district level. This is a delicate, but not impossible balancing act. Our experience has shown that by working collaboratively with teachers, principals can develop richer ways of adapting district-wide initiatives to local conditions.

Secondly, they are in the middle between the teachers and the superintendent. At the school level, the principal must represent the superintendent to the teachers. The principal must "sell" central office directives at the school site as if they were the principal's own. At the district level, the principal must represent the teachers to the superintendent. The principal must clearly communicate the vibrancy of teacher collaborative efforts to the superintendent while also bringing even negative teacher responses to district-wide initiatives.

This middleness may well represent the most difficult part of restructuring as moving to collaborative working relationships.

REFERENCES

Barth, Roland (1991). *Improving schools from within.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Sarason, Seymour B (1990). *The predictable failure of educational reform,* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Smith, Kenwyn (1982). *Groups in conflict: Prisons in disguise.* Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.